

Easter Vigil 2025

Exodus 14:10-31, 15:20-21

Luke 24:1-12

Faith and Miracles

Let's talk about miracles.

If a miracle happened to us today, how would we experience it?

In much of our storytelling, when a miracle happens, the characters in the story recognize that something completely unexpected has happened, accept that it is real, and act accordingly.

This evening we heard the story of the people of Israel escaping from slavery through the Red Sea. How many of you were thinking of Charlton Heston and *The Ten Commandments*? Charlton (uh I mean, Moses) commands the sea to part, the people of Israel see it parted, and walk right through, like it's something they do everyday.

Isn't that how we imagine miracles working? The miracle happens, in a way plain to our senses, apparent to our reason, and **then** we go forward.

We look for miracles like that. We've learned to expect them, based on the stories and shows and movies we all grew up with.

We have been misled.

There are more profound miracles all around us.

Quiet miracles, miracles that sneak up on us, miracles that are not recognized as miracles until after the fact. We step into situations that look hopeless and beyond control, and find they, we, are not hopeless. Healing, relationship, growth blossoms.

What if the people of Israel, with death or slavery behind them, the sea in front of them, with no boat, no lifejacket, no swimming lessons when they were kids, somehow are able to say "Moses tells us to go forward, and no way am I going back to slavery", and then start walking – and only when they are half way through realize that the sea has opened and they are walking on dry ground?

It really changes the story to step into the unknown and only then to realize a miracle is happening.

That is the sort of miracle I find in this life. That's how it seems to be for the people of faith I share my life with.

They don't wait for the sea to part, for certainty, before taking a first step. They say whatever is holding me back, whatever is enslaving me, whatever is keeping me separated from my sibling sharing this world, I am stepping away from that. Not knowing what's next.

From the beginning of Christianity it has been the practice to baptize adult converts at this service, the Vigil of Easter. Historically, this was done after a long period of preparation where the candidates would discern their call to the Christian life. During that period of discernment, the candidates would attend Sunday services, but only the Service of the Word; after the readings and the sermon, they would be, sometimes fairly unceremoniously, asked to leave the assembly. They would arrive at their baptism having never experienced the Service of the Table.

At the Easter Vigil, after their baptism and confirmation, they would have communion with their new sisters and brothers and siblings for the first time. Quite literally starting their lives as Christians by stepping into the unknown.

We are not done hearing from scripture this evening, and soon we will hear a story from the Gospel of Luke. Despite all of the stories available in the four Gospels of followers interacting with the post-resurrection Jesus, the story chosen for this service is faithful women visiting his tomb and finding it empty. Two angels in dazzling clothes tell them:

Why do you look for the living one among the dead?

I always imagine the angels singing:

Why do you look for the living one among the dead?

Our journey, our walk with The Living One, the Risen Jesus, is a journey of faith. Faith, not certainty.

Anne Lamott writes:

The opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty. Certainty is missing the point entirely. Faith includes noticing the mess, the emptiness and discomfort, and letting it be there until some light returns¹.

Jesus is risen. Faith doesn't mean that we will encounter him like a Charlton Heston movie, with a carefully crafted story and special effects and big name actors, all to make sure we don't miss it.

We started this service by kindling a new fire, lighting one candle, and then more candles, filling the church with light as we heard the *Exsultet* sung. We didn't need big budget special effects; we kindled a new fire and lit our candles, and it was enough.

Jesus is risen. The angels remind us of what Israel experienced when they left Egypt, that we won't find miracles, we won't find the Risen Jesus, in the tomb of certainty, but in life, glorious and messy and uncertain.

We don't have to walk into the sea to find our miracles. Making time for meditation, having that conversation you have been avoiding, thinking through new ideas seriously, getting to know someone new, or remembering to bring something for the feeding ministry this month are also opportunities to step into life, and even discover a miracle.

It's a little disappointing that we are not baptizing anyone today; folks being baptized are a powerful witness for us who have been following this path for a while that faith is a step into uncertainty.

In a minute we will renew our own baptismal vows. As we do, we can remember that our journey with Jesus the Anointed one, our journey with this community, our journey of faith is far from over. We continue to step into the unknown, into uncertainty, into faith, into life: into the place where the angels say The Risen One will be found.

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¹ Anne Lamott, *Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith*